

Director's Report: The educational landscape 2016

AISCA creates a positive social, fiscal and political environment in which independent schools are free to maintain their identity as they serve the public interest.

Although it feels like Christmas was only a few weeks ago, here we are already approaching the quarter mark of 2016.

In your schools you are likely living out that challenging task of working in the immediate, while also planning for the future. While the day to day issues and challenges tend to take precedent, there is also the necessary task of planning budgets and considering staffing for the upcoming year.

Here at AISCA we also face that reality. Our day to day work is taken up with a number of items. Teacher certification is in full swing; this year we will be coordinating the evaluation of around 180 teachers who are seeking their permanent teaching certificate. AISCA is also involved in committees on a myriad of educational topics: the Deputy Minister's Teacher and Leadership Excellence advisory committee, Teaching Quality Standard and School Leaders Standard working committee, Inclusion, Safe and Caring Schools, Diploma Exam review, Teaching Excellence Award, and Teacher Advisory Committees. We have also met with Education Minister David Eggen, Wildrose Education Critic Mark Smith, and a range of representatives from Alberta Education. We've written letters and briefs on issues such as Home Education, and the Guidelines for Best Practices, and we've visited schools and Early

Childhood Service programs. And yet, during the hectic day to day work, we also take time to consider key markers on the educational landscape for 2016.

Certainly many of our schools consider March 31st, the deadline for submitting policies regarding Section 16.1 of the *School Act*, to the Education Minister, as being a key marker on the horizon.

AISCA has worked to ensure that all schools have available templates for safe and caring school policies, and will continue to work with our schools to ensure that they have the necessary information regarding this issue, as it is made available by the ministry.

Much work has also been done on creating an updated Teaching Quality Standard, as well as a new School Leader Standard, and a School Authority Leaders Standard. AISCA has been quite involved in this process to date, and will look to provide guidance and support for implementation of these initiatives once they come into effect.

Another key marker that will impact independent schools in Alberta is the provincial government's budget this April. AISCA discussed this with Minister Eggen during a meeting in late February (see article elsewhere in this

newsletter), and received assurances that the government continues to plan for supporting all schools, including independent schools in a sustainable and equitable manner. During these difficult economic times, it is important for schools to educate their communities, and their elected officials regarding the significant cost savings that independent schools provide to the public purse.

Although more could be said about future events, I'll conclude by touching on two that are specific to AISCA. The first is the upcoming AGM on May 6th which will focus on 'Education for Reconciliation'; please mark your calendars and plan to attend. The second item will receive further attention at the AGM; a new website for AISCA will be introduced with many helpful features for our member schools!

I wish you success as you seek to balance the immediate and the future in your work.



**John Jagersma,
Executive Director**

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Private schools save the public purse millions each year

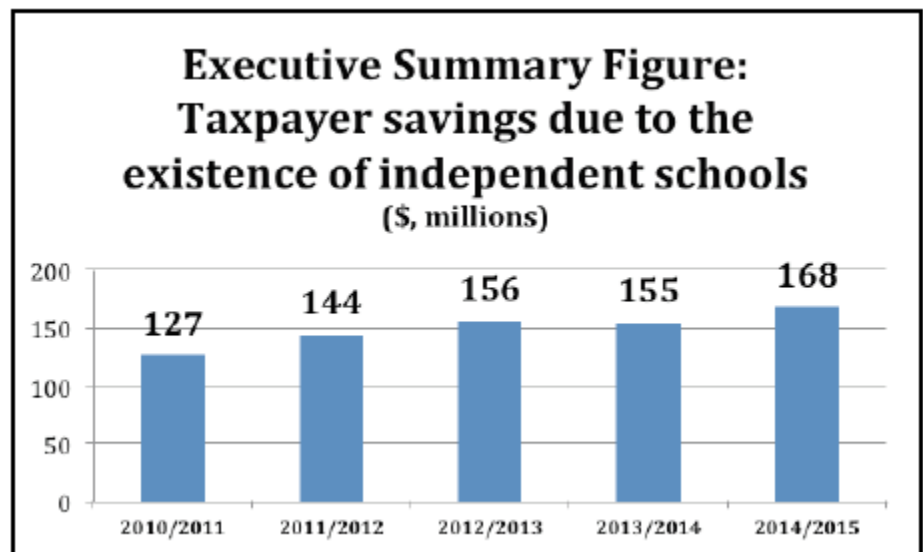
“there is solid support for the position that Albertans who have chosen independent schools for their children, have collectively saved the public purse over a billion dollars in the past 5 years.”

The most recent budget (available at parentchoice.ca) estimates show Alberta projecting a deficit of over 10 billion dollars for the coming year. This difficult economic condition creates pressure on the government to cut costs wherever possible. To the uninformed, eliminating spending money on private schools might seem like a good place to start; after all, the government put 239 million dollars towards independent schools and ECS programs in the 2015 budget.

independent schools are registered as home taxpayer of a student in the education students; these students reflect an additional savings to Alberta tax payers of around 25 million dollars per year. His research showed that independent schools saved the government 750 million dollars over the past 5 years. And it is fair to say that these numbers are conservative. They don't reflect the reality that the government doesn't pay for any pension plan costs for teachers in independent schools. They also don't incorporate the fact that all capital costs for independent schools are paid for with private dollars. Finally the numbers also don't include the reality that over 7000 students in

All told, there is solid support for the position that Albertans who have chosen independent schools for their children, have collectively saved the public purse about a billion dollars in the past 5 years.

The reality is, however, that independent schools save the government hundreds of millions of dollars. Mark Milke, in his article titled, *Alberta's Independent Schools: Taxpayers Saved \$750 million* While there are important social and philosophical reasons to support choice in education, the fiscal benefits shouldn't go unnoticed.



Milke, Mark. (2015). *Alberta's Independent Schools: Taxpayers Saved \$750 Million*. Calgary: Parents for Choice in Education.

AISCA Meeting with Education Minister David Eggen

On Wednesday, February 24th, members of the AISCA board and staff met with Education Minister Eggen. The meeting was arranged as a follow up to a letter that AISCA had sent, expressing concerns regarding a lack of consultation leading to development of the *Guidelines for Best Practices: Creating Learning Environments that Respect Diverse Sexual Orientations, Gender Identities and Gender Expressions*. As well, AISCA expressed concern about the grant to the ATA to provide professional development support to independent schools.

The meeting went well, with both the Minister and AISCA having the opportunity to express views on the topics noted above, as well as on some other aspects of education in the province.

On the topic of the Guidelines, AISCA emphasized the importance of involving a wide range of stake holders when addressing complex educational matters,

and encouraged the minister to invite AISCA to the table for such discussions in the future.

The Minister emphasized that the Guidelines were written in response to board requests, and that individual schools would need to balance the requirements of their local context with their obligation to fulfill the requirements of the applicable legislation.

In regards to the ATA receiving grant money for work in private schools, the discussion focused on the process used in making this decision, and the importance of government continuing to use AISCA as the conduit for support of educational initiatives in independent schools in the future.

AISCA also took the opportunity of the meeting to discuss the importance of continued equitable and sustainable financial support. Minister Eggen assured AISCA that his government was committed to maintaining the status quo in its approach to independent schools.

The Minister noted that AISCA has accurately pointed out that the independent schools save the public purse money. He also noted that the educational system in Alberta needs all the capacity it can get, and that independent schools contribute to the overall capacity of the system.

The meeting concluded with a high level discussion on some of the work that AISCA is involved with, as well as the expressed wish of both the Minister and AISCA to arrange for more regular communication.

These meetings are a valuable way of ensuring clear communication between independent schools and the Ministry of Education, and for AISCA to ensure that the importance of continued support for choice in education is advocated for at the highest levels.

A new website for AISCA

www.aisca.ab.ca

Don't rush to the AISCA website just yet, as the development of the site is ongoing, but by late this spring there will be an entirely new website for the association. This process will be accompanied by the introduction of a new logo, as part of a 'rebranding' effort that began late last year.

Some AISCA members may question why the association would spend the time and money on a new website.

Well, for those of you who have visited the AISCA site recently the answer may be self-evident. However, beyond the obvious need for an update, the more compelling reason for the Association is the desire to use the site to provide better service to our member schools.

Our goal with the new site is to provide clear information on the value of independent schools, while also giving schools access to a range of tools. While AISCA will continue to advocate for all independent schools, many of the features will only be available to members of AISCA.

The new website will feature:

- A school directory with active links to school webpages;
- A job posting section for schools to advertise vacant positions;
- An 'Easy Advocacy' section that includes form letters readers can use to inform elected officials about matters pertinent to independent schools;
- An e-newsletter, and links to previous newsletters; and
- Online registration for AISCA events and association membership

The importance of broad based advocacy

Open houses and other community connection type initiatives are a great start, as are tours and meetings with your elected officials.

A key aspect of AISCA's work is the intentional advocacy on behalf of independent schools. One means through which AISCA pursues this is by holding meetings with elected officials. This includes two meetings with Minister Eggen in the past year. However, the association does not support any one party and seeks opportunities to meet with all MLAs to further broaden their understanding of independent schools and to offer our services to provide further information as required. To this end AISCA has met with MLAs from a number of parties. This includes meetings with Wildrose

Education Critic Mark Smith. Mr. Smith's role as opposition critic makes it particularly important for AISCA to meet with him, to ensure he clearly understands the service that independent schools and ECS programs provide and the need for continued support for choice in the educational system.

AISCA also does research and provides briefs to Alberta Education on a range of educational topics, and also conducts information presentations to societies, committees, and university students.

However, schools need to understand their own responsibility for advocacy as well. Open houses and other community connection initiatives are a great start, as are tours and meetings with your elected officials.

In the all too busy school day, it may seem a low priority initiative, but these efforts bear real fruit.

AISCA encourages all independent schools and ECS programs to continue to seek opportunities to educate the public and elected officials on the great things that are happening in your institutions.

AISCA AGM May 6th: 'Education for Reconciliation'

Plans for the 2016 AISCA Annual General Meeting are well under way. The event will be hosted at the Four Points Sheraton Hotel in Calgary on Friday May 6th. There will be three main areas of focus for the day. The keynote addresses will focus on the theme 'Education for Reconciliation' with the intent to further the discussion about how to support First Nations, Metis, and Inuit students in our classrooms, and also to deepen the understanding of independent school staff and ECS leaders on the topic.

We are fortunate to have tentatively booked two excellent keynote speakers for the event: Wilton Littlechild, and Jane Martin.

Chief Littlechild served as one of the three Commissioners of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. He has also served as a Member of Parliament, and advocated for the rights of Indigenous Peoples at provincial, federal, and international levels. Dr. Jane Martin serves as Alberta Education's Assistant Deputy Minister for First Nations, Metis, and Inuit Education.

In the afternoon, the membership will be introduced to the new AISCA website, including information on how to access various aspects of the site to update their school directory information and to post any

teaching positions they may have available.

Finally, the meeting will conclude with a review of the work that AISCA has completed during the past year, as well as a review of, and vote on, a new set of association bylaws and the AISCA budget including the financial statements.

The AGM is a great opportunity to network and connect with other school leaders, and promises to be an engaging and informative event!



"I would say: it is time to lift each other up. We are so used to putting each other down,"

*-Chief Wilton Littlechild
Guest speaker
AISCA AGM*